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[TITLE PAGE]

INSTALLATION OF A NEW SHILLUK KING

[The following account, by a Shilluk pupil at Rumbek Secondary School, originally appeared in the *Rumbek Magazine* for 1954, and is reprinted with the permission of the Ministry of Education. It is, so far as is known, the first written account of the ceremony by a member of the Shilluk people. The article has been read by Dr. P. P. Howell, who considered it to be of sufficient interest to warrant publication in *Sudan Notes and Records*.]

When the Reth of the Shilluk dies, all the senior chiefs of the thirteen divisions of the country are summoned to Fashoda, the chief reigning village (pan duong), by the District Commissioner and the Head Chief of Fashoda Division, to attend the election of the new Reth.

The new Reth is not to be elected from among the late Reth's sons, but from another branch of the Royal Family. In the election the elder son of a Reth and a left-handed Prince cannot be elected, according to traditional custom. A woman has no claim to the Rethship. It happened once in the past that there was one Queen called Abudhok who reigned in Fashoda, but from thenceforward no woman has held the Rethship.

As soon as the Nyireth (Prince) is elected Reth he is taken to Fashoda, where he remains quietly until the late Reth's wuowo (mourning dance) has been held. After this, the installation of the new Reth, or the coronation ceremony, follows. Before the coronation the people of Padhiang, north-west of Fashoda, are sent to the Nuba mountains to fetch some holy bamboos which are used in the coronation, and the blacksmiths of Golbunyo at the northern side of Fashoda, and those of Nyinkango and Both in the south, are busy making the coronation spears. First comers from among the Nyikango's army (Kwanyikwom) pass to Obay in the southern part of the country to bring some palm leaves for making whips with which they beat people during the coronation. In Debalo Kwom there are some people carving ivories. The performers of the coronation fix some branches of thorn trees in front of their villages on the roads, being authorized by tradition to stop any man passing along that road without his giving an offering to them. The people of Tonga paddle far south in their canoes to Lake No to fetch the ambatch (abomi Nyikango).

After the accomplishment of all these things, the Reth is taken to Debalo Kwom south of Fashoda, a village where the coronation seat is kept. In Debalo there is a little herd of cattle from Pathow which the Reth looks after, and he is treated roughly like a small boy by the head chief of Debalo, before he takes his position as Reth. Nobody is allowed to go among these cows or to take any fire from among them. Any unfortunate fellow going near them is seized by Kwa Nyuth and made to give something. These cows go together with the Reth to Fashoda where he looks after them again.

In this installation there are two rival armies, the army of the Reth and the army of Nyikango. Nyikango's army brings the images of Nyikango and Dak his son from Akurwa, a village in the northern part of the country. Without the power of Nyikango and Dak the new king cannot be crowned. When the party leaves Akurwa they have four resting places before they reach Fashoda. In the last, Adot Nyigir, two miles from Fashoda, they await the arrival of the Reth's army from Debalo.

[1] Nyikango was the founder of the Shilluk Kingdom. At his death he is said not to have been buried but to have disappeared in the sky.

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643 When the Reth's army begins to move out to meet Nyikango's, all the people of Debalo run away clapping the handles of their spears, meaning that the Reth will never return to Debalo until he dies. As he goes out a bull is laid down on his path, whereupon he walks over it in front of the procession, pulling another bull by the tail. The latter is covered with white cloths and is meant to reach Fashoda, being dragged in this manner—Fashoda is about two and a half miles from Debalo. The spear from the shrine at Bol and another from Lul are also brought for the coronation ceremony.

Now scouts are sent to see if Nyikango's army is approaching and to report the news back to the Reth. In the Reth's army the people carry some dura stalks representing spears with which they fight with the army of Nyikango by throwing them. The members of Nyikango's army carry long thongs of twisted grass which they use as whips to disperse the Reth's army, so that they will leave the Reth in [753 828] their hands to be taken by the spirit of Nyikango. The whips are filled with the spirit and the people are frightened by them, as being touched by the whip is enough to produce madness unless gifts are offered to Nyikango's people. Princes are not [644] allowed to go near the Reth during the procession, because if the Reth is killed by [669] any of them during the coronation procession from Debalo to Fashoda the coronation is not postponed, but the people at once seize a nearby Prince, or the prince who killed him, to replace the slain Nyireth—he is not yet Reth, as he has not been possessed by the spirit of Nyikango—and the coronation continues. Because of this danger during the procession the Reth has to be protected by his policemen and the senior chiefs, who keep the ordinary people away from him.

According to the custom, when the Reth's army reaches the dry khor called Arebujur near Fashoda, which is the boundary between the two parties, a black bull is laid down. The Reth boldly walks over the bull and across to the other side to meet the party of Nyikango. As soon as they come near each other the two armies begin to fight, throwing dura stalks at each other. At that moment the Reth is seized from his army by the people of Nyikango and clothed with the spirit of Nyikango. Here Nyikango's army are busy sending people away with their whips so as to leave the Reth with the group of performers of the ceremony. After this he is taken to a round cleared place and circulated four times there before entering Fashoda. As this is done he is escorted to Fashoda by two holy maidens with the image of Nyikango [644] on his shoulder. These two maidens are taken from the performers of the coronation and later become wives to the new Reth.

In Fashoda he is taken in front of the Nyikango's shrine and placed on a silver coronation seat covered with white cloths, and the image of Nyikango and Dak are held over him in order that he might be possessed of their powers. With him are his sub-chief and the chief of Kwanyiyek holding the legs of the Reth as he is sitting on the seat. He remains in an open place for some time, with the group holding some [775] white cloths as a shelter around him. Meanwhile Nyikango's army beat their drums and sing Nyikango's songs. Here the Reth is said to be shaken by the power of Nyikango as he is being possessed by him.

643 After the performance of this, the Reth and his sub-chief are taken to one of 233 the roughly-made huts near Nyikango's shrine, where they stay for two days, with the Reth keeping the little herd of Nyikango's cattle which was brought from Debalo. This kind of action is done so as to obtain good fortune in the future during his kingship. Here he is treated as he was in Debalo, being made to do the work of a small boy, making fires for these cows and clearing their place. This work is done

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at about four o'clock in the morning, when nobody will see him at his work but the chief only, who tells him what to do.

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During these days Nyikango's army remain with the other people dancing and beating their drums, playing with the images of Nyikango and Dak outside or in front of the shrine. At the end of two days the Reth is taken to four high temples (Athurwic) on a mound, and stays in them for another two days. Nyikango's army continue beating their drums night and day, so the people from afar are attracted by them, and they come to join the dancing. At the end of this time all the senior and ordinary chiefs gather together in Fashoda at a final advisory council (Loko), where the Reth is given the right to take up the post of king. The senior chiefs make speeches giving him advice to perform his professional task justly, and after the speech of the best orator the drum is beaten as a sign of praise. At the close of the speeches he is given two silver bracelets which are put around his wrists, as a sign of his office. These bracelets represent the crown and remain with him during his reign. After this he is invested with his holy office, which cannot be taken away from him or be abdicated until he dies.

After the coronation Nyikango and his carriers remain in Fashoda for two months pending the first fall of the rains. As the first rain of the autumn appears, the party begins to leave Fashoda for Akurwa, where Nyikango's and Dak's images are kept until the coronation of another Reth.